



THE FORT COLLINS ROOSTERS

A Franchise History of The Big League — 2001 to 2031

Thirteen Octobers. No trophy. A bird that crows before the light.

In the style of Geoffrey C. Ward

PROLOGUE

The Bird That Crows Before the Light

There is a reason they are called the Roosters, and it has nothing to do with the daylight.

A rooster does not crow because the sun has risen. A rooster crows because it believes the sun is coming — calls out into the cold and the dark of the foothills, before there is any proof at all, on nothing but faith that the morning is on its way. The bird is wrong about the hour as often as it is right. It crows anyway. That is the whole of its character: to announce a dawn it cannot yet see.

Fort Collins is a baseball town built on exactly that kind of faith. The air thins as it climbs toward the Front Range, the late-innings light goes hard and golden against the mountains, and hope, like a fly ball in the high country, carries a little farther than it has any right to. For thirty-one seasons the city has filled its ballpark on the strength of a feeling it can never quite prove — that this year, finally, the long night ends and the sun comes up over a championship.

It has not happened yet. In thirty-one years the Roosters have reached October thirteen times, won two division flags, sent men to the Hall of Fame, and built rosters the rest of the league openly envied — and they have never once held the trophy. Theirs is not the story of a franchise that failed. It is the story of a franchise that kept crowing. Thirteen Octobers, a half-dozen heartbreaks that became local scripture, and a city that has never stopped believing the light is just over the ridge.

This is the story of the long wait for morning.

I

The First Crow

2001 – 2003

The Big League was born in the winter of 2000, and in the spring of 2001 every club in it began life on the same blank page — same empty trophy case, same common pool of players, same unwritten history. What a franchise would become was, that first season, entirely a matter of what it chose to do with nothing.

Fort Collins chose to win immediately. The Roosters took **ninety-one games** in their inaugural year, finished first in the Jade Division, and marched into the first October the league had ever known. There were no ghosts yet, no curse, no decades of waiting — only a brand-new team that already played like it

belonged. At the heart of it stood a young shortstop named **Bill Brice**, the fifteenth pick of the franchise's first draft, a smooth and gifted infielder who would put together a near-**8-WAR season in 2002** and, years and a trade later, walk into the Hall of Fame wearing another club's cap. For three summers in Fort Collins he was the face of the thing — a .294 hitter in red, the first star the city ever loved.

And then, in that very first October, the heartbreak that would define everything began.

The 2001 Roosters climbed all the way to the Ice Conference Championship and pushed it to a seventh and final game — one win, a single win, from the pennant. They lost it. Game 7. The town's first taste of October was also its first taste of October's particular cruelty: to be carried right up to the edge of the far shore, close enough to see it, and sent home. Nobody knew yet that they were watching the franchise's whole future in miniature.

They were good again in 2002 — **ninety-two wins** — and stayed near the top in 2003 with 85. Alongside Brice rose a thick-shouldered young hitter named **Kyle Lacy**, who would become the quiet engine of the early Roosters: a man who hit two hundred and fifty-eight home runs in Fort Collins colors, drove in runs by the hundred, and put together a 5.8-WAR rookie season in that very first summer of 2001. The page was no longer blank. The Roosters had written themselves, in three short years, into a contender. The only word they could not yet spell was *champion*.

II

The Architect

2004 – 2010

To understand the Roosters you must understand the man who built them, because for nineteen straight years there was only one.

His name was **Kyle**, and he ran Fort Collins the way a watchmaker runs a bench — patiently, precisely, obsessed with the parts no one else bothered to examine. He was, by wide agreement, the most meticulous executive in The Big League. He scouted the draft deeper than anyone, hunting in the late rounds and the cold corners of the board for players the rest of the league had already crossed off, and he turned a remarkable number of them into everyday big leaguers. Kyle Lacy, a second-round afterthought, became a 258-homer cornerstone. The farm system never went bare. The big-league roster, year after year, arrived balanced and deep and homegrown — pitching raised in the system, lineups stocked from within, value conjured from places other teams saw only dirt.

For nearly two decades it worked, in the only way Kyle ever let it work: completely, except for the last step. Under his hand the Roosters reached the postseason **thirteen times** and won two division titles, and the city came to believe — genuinely, durably believe — that a championship was not a hope but an inevitability, a thing simply waiting its turn.

There was one stumble in the climb. In 2005 the machine briefly seized: a **63–99 season**, the worst in franchise history, a single dark winter in the middle of the run. Kyle did what Kyle always did. He went back to the workbench, restocked the system, and had Fort Collins back to **ninety-four wins by 2007** — and back in the league's final four, where the heartbreak waited, patient as ever. The Roosters bowed out in five games. They would do it again in 2013. And again in 2017. Three times Kyle built a team good enough to reach the last four standing, and three times it got no further.

His monument was not a trophy. It was a method — a way of finding and raising ballplayers so sound that it outlived him, echoing through the minor leagues for years after he was gone. When the writers handed Kyle the GM of the Year award, it was not for a championship he never won. It was for the relentless, granular excellence of the building itself. He was the architect of nineteen years of belief. He just never got to hang the one banner all of it was for.

III

The Years of Almost

2011 – 2017

This is the chapter the city cannot talk about without lowering its voice.

By the early 2010s Kyle's method had produced its finest crop, and for seven seasons the Roosters were not merely good — they were a genuine power, the kind of team that printed playoff tickets in August. The young talent arrived in waves. In 2013 a right fielder named **Jason Blanc**, a second-round pick the rest of the league had let slide, won the Rookie of the Year award and announced himself as the next homegrown star — a .292 hitter for his Fort Collins career, a 255-homer bat, a man who would post an **8.6-WAR season in 2015** and finish second in the MVP race. On the mound stood **Andre Crawford**, as fine an arm as the franchise ever ran out there: **a hundred and thirty wins, a 3.07 ERA, and 1,575 strikeouts** in red, with a **7.2-WAR peak in 2013**. Behind them the workhorse **Jimmy Adamcik** logged better than 1,600 innings, and the lineup ran deep with the kind of complementary pieces only a great farm system can grow.

In 2013 they won ninety-three and reached the final four. They lost in five.

And then came **2015** — the year the sun was supposed to rise. That team won **a hundred and five games**, the most in franchise history before or since. It claimed the Jade Division. It was the number-one seed in the entire league, a juggernaut built end to end to finally break the drought, the clear favorite, the team of destiny the city had been promised since 2001. Kyle won GM of the Year for assembling it.

It lost in the Divisional Championship. Seven games. The best Roosters team ever built went home one round earlier than the worst kind of math allows, and a city that had waited fourteen years for exactly this was left holding another Game 7 it would never get back. There is no consoling way to describe it. A 105-win season, the top seed, the whole thing aligned — and the morning still did not come.

They tried again in 2017, and this team was nearly as good: **a hundred and one wins**, another deep run, another arrival in the final four behind Crawford and the rising **Tony D'Arcangelo**. It lost in five. The third final-four exit in five games of the Kyle era, the latest verse of the same unending hymn.

Seven years of almost. The most talent the franchise ever held, the highest the city's hopes ever climbed — and not one October that ended with the lights still on. It is the cruelest stretch in Roosters history precisely because it was the best. They were close enough to taste it, every single year. They never once got to swallow.

The Heartbeat: Dave Morgan

Every franchise that waits this long needs someone to do the waiting for it. In Fort Collins, that man was **Dave Morgan**, and no player has ever been more fully the embodiment of what Roosters baseball was trying to be.

Kyle drafted him seventh overall in 2006 — a high pick, for once, rather than a late-round steal — and Morgan rewarded it with twelve seasons of the steadiest greatness the city has ever housed. He was a third baseman in the old, unglamorous sense: durable, tireless, immovable. He played **1,761 games** in a Roosters uniform, more than any man before him, and over those dozen years he hit **four hundred and twenty-nine home runs**, drove in **1,140**, collected **1,838 hits**, and banked a staggering **70.4 wins above replacement** — the largest body of work in franchise history, by a wide and lonely margin. In 2014 he produced a **9.1-WAR season**, one of the finest individual campaigns Fort Collins has ever watched.

He never won the MVP. That was Morgan's lot, and somehow the most fitting thing about him: three separate times — 2009, 2011, 2014 — he finished second in the balloting, the bridesmaid of the high country, brilliant enough to be in every conversation and never quite the name they called. He was the heartbeat through every contender and every rebuild, the one fixed point while the roster churned around him, the symbol of a franchise that was reliable, tough, and quietly elite, and that could never quite get over the top.

When his time came he left, as the great ones sometimes must, signing in free agency with Nashville and finishing his career in another city's colors. But the verdict has since come back, and it came back gold: **Dave Morgan is in the Hall of Fame.** The heartbeat of the Roosters, the man who never won the trophy and never won the MVP, will be remembered forever anyway — proof that in Fort Collins, the deepest kind of greatness was always the kind that simply showed up, every day, and refused to leave.

IV

The Lights Go Down

2018 – 2022

Time comes for every method, even one as careful as Kyle's. The great core aged. Morgan moved on to Nashville. Crawford, the ace, walked in free agency after 2016 and went to Mexico City, where — in a twist the high country has never fully forgiven — he won **three Pitcher of the Year awards**, becoming the Hall-of-Fame talent who forged his first greatness in Fort Collins and his legend somewhere else. By 2018 the Roosters had slipped to eighty-four wins; in 2019, at eighty-nine wins and a fourth-place finish, they reached October for what no one yet knew would be the last time in a long time.

And then Kyle retired, and the careful machine he had run for nineteen years was handed, all at once, to men who did not know how to run it.

The first was **Sean**, the former Atlanta executive whose reputation arrived a step ahead of him — a dealer, a shuffler, a man who joined organizations, moved the big pieces, and left before the bill came due. His single Fort Collins season in 2020 followed the script to the letter. Unable to leave well enough alone, he dealt franchise cornerstone **Jason Blanc** and a veteran starter to Denver that July for a packet of late draft picks and depth — a trade that stunned the fan base and cracked the clubhouse down the middle. A month later Sean himself was gone, without a farewell or a forwarding address. Some said a consulting job overseas; some said a cabin in Alberta and a manifesto on front-office inefficiency. Whatever the truth, he never came back, and he left the Roosters lighter by a homegrown star and heavier by nothing that mattered.

After the wreckage came the quiet. **Chad** took the chair in 2021 and steadied a listing ship as best a private man could, guiding two respectable, joyless seasons through a brutal Jade Division — seventy-eight wins, then 81 — before the weight of it wore him down. *It's not the losing that breaks you*, he is said to have told a friend on his way out. *It's realizing every series feels like the postseason.* By the end of 2022 the franchise was calm again. Too calm. The stands had thinned, the fire had banked low, and Fort

Collins — for the first time in its history — was a baseball town waiting not for a championship but simply for someone who could make it care again.

V

Waiting for Morning

2023 – 2029

The man they found was **Tim**, and unlike the three who came before him, he had actually done it.

Tim was a figure out of Big League lore, the executive who had guided the Montreal Machine to the 2005 championship — a patient builder, cool and quiet, a proven winner in a chair that had lately held only chaos. He inherited a franchise at its lowest ebb. The won-loss column told the hard truth of a real rebuild: seventy-four wins in 2023, then 73, then a bottom of **68–94 in 2025** and another 70-win slog in 2026, the leanest stretch the city had endured since the dark winter of 2005. The stars of the golden age were gone. The Octobers were a memory. For the first time in a generation, no one was promising anyone a sunrise.

But Tim was not trying to reinvent Fort Collins. He was trying to remind it. The drafting philosophy Kyle built still hummed beneath the surface, still turning over young talent, and slowly the new roster took shape — a steady infielder named **Brock Davis** leading the club in hitting through the down years, a patient corner bat named **Emilio Della Mea**, a backstop named **Chris Goers** finding his footing. And then, from the deepest corner of the board, came the crow that meant the morning.

His name is **Jesse Beck**, and he is everything Kyle's Fort Collins was supposed to produce. The Roosters took him in the **eighteenth round of the 2024 draft — the 553rd player chosen**, a number that is a synonym for *forgotten*. By 2029 he was the best pitcher in the organization: a **2.93 ERA, a 6.1-WAR season at twenty-seven**, a homegrown ace conjured from nothing, in the truest tradition of the franchise that found him. Around him the club finally turned back toward the light — **eighty wins in 2028, 83 in 2029**, the arrow pointing up for the first time in years.

The sun is not up yet. But out past the ridge, in the cold dark before the dawn, the bird is crowing again. And in Fort Collins, that has always been the same thing as hope.

VI

Still Dark

2030 – 2031

The arrow that had been pointing up stopped pointing anywhere.

In 2030 the Roosters won eighty-four games, one more than the year before, and finished sixth. In 2031 they won seventy-five and finished sixth again. It is now twelve straight seasons out of October — the last berth came in 2019 — and sixteen years since the last division flag, and the honest summary of Tim's tenure is that he stopped the fall without yet producing a rise. The rebuild's young core did not break out. It simply held.

What the high country did produce in those two summers was defense. **Andres Maldonado** won a Gold Glove in 2028, another in 2029, another in 2030, and a fourth in 2031 — four straight, the longest streak of hardware in franchise history, from a player almost nobody outside the Front Range can name. **Emilio Della Mea** took Gold Gloves in 2028 and 2030. **Chris Goers** won a Silver Slugger in 2029. These are the honors of a team that catches the ball beautifully and does not score enough runs, which is a recognizable kind of club and not the kind that wins anything in October.

Thirty-one seasons. Thirteen Octobers. Thirteen times home without it. The bird has now been crowing in the dark for twelve straight seasons, and the dark has not obliged.

That is the whole test of the thing, and Fort Collins has never once failed it. The park still fills. The faith was never contingent on the dawn arriving on schedule. A rooster that only crowed when it could already see the light would just be a bird reporting the news.

VII

The Faith

There is one more thing to say, and it is the truest thing about this franchise of all.

The Roosters have played thirty-one seasons. They have won 2,574 games and lost 2,450, a record built one high-country summer at a time. They have reached October thirteen times and come home thirteen times without the trophy. They have lost a Game 7 for the pennant, a Game 7 in the division round as the best team in baseball, and three final-four series in five games apiece. They have watched their ace win three awards for someone else and their heartbeat take a Hall of Fame plaque to a different town. By the cold arithmetic of banners, no franchise in the league has come so far, so often, with so little to hang on the wall.

And still the park fills. Still the city believes. Still, on a clear Sunday with the light coming hard off the mountains, Fort Collins shows up convinced that this is the year the long night finally breaks — because that is what a Rooster is, and always has been. Not a bird that waits for proof. A bird that crows in the dark, on faith, certain the morning is coming.

For a franchise that has come this close, this many times, that faith might be the truest tradition of all.

The dawn is still out there. The Roosters are still crowing.

The Ledger

Franchise founded: 2001 (charter member, The Big League)

Home: Fort Collins Stadium — capacity 45,000

Conference: Ice Conference, Jade Division

All-time regular-season record (2001–2031): 2,574–2,450 (.512)

Postseason appearances: 13 in 31 seasons (last: 2019)

League Championships: 0

Championship series appearances: 0

Division titles: 2 (2001, 2015)

Best season: 2015 (105–57, No. 1 overall seed)

Worst season: 2005 (63–99)

Most Valuable Players: 0

Cy Young Awards: 0

Rookies of the Year: 2 — Jason Blanc (2013, Ice Conference), Morgan Alison (2025, Ice Conference)

Hall of Famers: 1 of its own — Dave Morgan (2026), 1,761 of his 2,317 games in red. Bill Brice (2018, 535 games here) and Andre Crawford (2031, 279) went in wearing another club's cap.

General managers: Kyle (2001–2019), Sean (2020), Chad (2021–2022), Tim (2023–)

Pillars of the Franchise

Dave Morgan, 3B (2008–2019) — The heartbeat, and the largest body of work in franchise history by a wide and lonely margin. Twelve seasons, 1,761 games, 1,838 hits, 429 home runs, 1,140 runs batted in,

a .277 average and 70.4 WAR in red, with a 9.1-WAR peak in 2014. Three times a Most Valuable Player runner-up (2009, 2011, 2014) and never the winner. Seventh overall in the 2006 draft. He left for Nashville in free agency and went into the Hall of Fame in 2026 anyway.

Kyle Lacy, 3B (2001–2010) — The quiet engine of the early Roosters. Ten seasons, 1,329 games, 258 home runs, 723 runs batted in and 38.8 WAR as a Rooster, beginning with a 5.8-WAR rookie season in the franchise's first summer.

Jason Blanc, RF (2013–2020) — The homegrown jewel. Rookie of the Year of the Ice Conference in 2013, a .292 hitter across eight seasons with 255 home runs and 46.1 WAR, and an 8.6-WAR season in 2015 that finished second in the Most Valuable Player voting. Traded to Denver in July 2020 for a package of late draft picks, weeks before general manager Sean's abrupt departure.

Andre Crawford, SP (2008–2016) — The ace. Nine seasons, 130–68 with a 3.07 earned run average and 1,575 strikeouts over 1,745 Fort Collins innings, and a 7.2-WAR peak in 2013 that finished second for Pitcher of the Year. He left in free agency after 2016 and won three Pitcher of the Year awards with Mexico City, a first greatness forged in red.

Jimmy Adamcik, SP (2004–2013) — The workhorse of the Kyle era. Ten seasons, 1,607 innings, 82–89 with a 3.66 earned run average and 38.4 WAR, with a 5.5-WAR season in 2007 that finished second for Pitcher of the Year.

Bill Brice, SS (2001–2004) — The first star. Fifteenth overall in the franchise's first draft, a .294 hitter across 535 games with an 8.1-WAR peak in 2002. Traded to San Diego in 2004, and inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2018 wearing another club's cap.

Jesse Beck, SP (2027–2031) — The dawn. An eighteenth-round pick, 553rd overall, in 2024, who became the staff ace by 2029 on a 6.1-WAR season at twenty-seven. Five seasons, 47–36 with a 3.10 earned run average and 881 strikeouts.

The rest of the hardware: Ahmed Pollard took the Ice Conference Reliever of the Year award in 2009, the only one the franchise has. Tony D'Arcangelo finished third for Pitcher of the Year in 2017. Kyle was named General Manager of the Year in 2015, finished runner-up in 2017 and third in 2007, and it remains the only trophy anyone in this organization has been handed.

Never the last step: In thirteen postseason trips the Roosters have never won a championship. They lost a Game 7 Ice Conference Championship in 2001, a Game 7 divisional round as the number one overall seed in 2015, and five-game final-four exits in 2007, 2013 and 2017.

Compiled from The Big League franchise records, 2001–2031.